UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General and President of France meet at Headquarters; discuss situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including Rapid Reaction Force, and African development.

* United Nations personnel come under attack in various parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Bosnian Serbs continue to hold 15 military observers and 11 peace-keepers hostage.

* Special Representative for former Yugoslavia and UNHCR demand Bosnian Serbs honour existing agreements and remove all obstructions to humanitarian deliveries.

* Foreign Minister of Burundi and United States Ambassador evacuated to Bujumbura after ambush in Cibitoke Province; Special Representative to report to Secretary-General on incident.

* UNHCR and Angola sign memorandum of understanding to promote voluntary repatriation of 300,000 Angolan refugees.

* WHO reports slight increase in number of Ebola cases in Zaire; puts total at 280 confirmed or suspected cases, including 220 deaths.

* World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought to be observed for first time on Saturday, one year after signing of Desertification Convention.

* Secretary-General to participate in video conference with United States astronauts and Russian cosmonauts in outer space as part of United Nations fiftieth anniversary celebrations.

* Committee on NGOs recommends eight organizations for consultative status with Economic and Social Council.

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For information media—not an official record

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and French President Jacques Chirac met today, along with their aides, at Headquarters. They discussed the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Secretary-General expressed his appreciation for France's major role in the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR). They also reviewed the integration of the Rapid Reaction Force within the command structure of UNPROFOR as a peace-keeping operation, not an enforcement one.

The Secretary-General and the President also dealt with Africa, including the situations in Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and Western Sahara. They focused on African development, and agreed that it was imperative not to reduce, but to increase, development aid in order to avoid a destabilization of the continent in the future. The fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and the Organization's finances were also discussed at the meeting.

The Secretary-General later hosted a working lunch for the President, during which they discussed several topics. Mr. Chirac also had meetings with Security Council President Detlev Graf zu Rantzau (Germany) and General Assembly President Amara Essy (Cote d'Ivoire).

In remarks to correspondents, President Chirac voiced concern at the "disengagement" of some major countries from the issue of development aid. Regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina, he expressed hope that the Bosnian Serbs would release the remaining United Nations hostages within 48 hours. French peace-keepers could then free the four Bosnian Serb soldiers held by them in Sarajevo. He warned that any new offensive by the Bosnian Government would be a serious mistake and could lead to a very dangerous situation.

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The Bosnian Serbs today continued to hold 15 United Nations military observers and 11 Canadian peace-keepers hostage, according to a United Nations spokesman. Meanwhile, UNPROFOR personnel came under attack in various parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A Bosnian UNPROFOR employee driving a clearly-marked United Nations vehicle was shot and wounded by a sniper in Sarajevo yesterday, while a Russian observation post came under fire from Bosnian Government soldiers, the spokesman continued. Bosnian Serb soldiers fired on Nordic Battalion vehicles in Sector North-East, and the peace-keepers returned more than five-hundred rounds in self-defence. In Sector South-West, a British helicopter was forced to land after being hit by small-arms fire.

Meanwhile, there was intense fighting around Sarajevo, involving the use

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of mortars and heavy machine-guns. There was continuing speculation regarding the Bosnian Government build-up north of the city, although UNPROFOR was not in a position to confirm or deny any reports on developments there.

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Special Representative Yasushi Akashi and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sadako Ogata have demanded that the Bosnian Serbs immediately remove all obstructions to humanitarian deliveries in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In a letter to Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic, they said international humanitarian law and human decency entitled civilians to unhindered access to humanitarian supplies. They called on Dr. Karadzic to honour the commitments made in that regard over the past three years, and as recently as last week.

The letter warned of developing disasters in Sarajevo, Bihac, Gorazde, Srebrenica and Zepa. Due to obstructive actions by Bosnian Serb forces, humanitarian supplies and relief personnel could not reach those areas. "We can no longer tolerate the violation of exhaustively negotiated arrangements or the denial of well-developed procedures," the letter said. "We refuse to accept lame excuses, false allegations and suspicions or reference to uncontrolled elements to justify interference with free movement of humanitarian goods and staff."

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The Foreign Minister of Burundi, the United States Ambassador to the country, and the Special Representative of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) have been evacuated to Bujumbura, following yesterday's attack on their convoy in Cibitoke Province. One OAU observer was killed in the incident, while a Burundese soldier later died of his wounds.

A United Nations spokesman said there was still no indication as to who responsible for the attack on the convoy. Special Representative Ahmedou Ould Abdallah is preparing a report to the Secretary-General on the incident.

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The UNHCR and Angola have signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the voluntary repatriation of some 300,000 Angolan refugees. It calls for the formation of a repatriation committee to promote and implement the orderly return and reintegration of Angolan refugees in conditions of safety and dignity.

The memorandum was signed in Luanda by Kamel Morjane, Director of

UNHCR's Regional Bureau of Africa, and the Angolan Minister of Social Affairs and Reinsertion, Albino Malungo. Mr. Morjane said repatriation in Angola would greatly enhance peace and stability in the whole southern African region.

Since the signing in November of a peace agreement ending nearly two decades of civil war in Angola, some 5,500 refugees have returned spontaneously. Zaire currently hosts about 200,000 Angolan refugees, Zambia 96,000, Congo 12,000 and Namibia 1,000. In addition, there are about 15,000 Angolan refugees in another 32 countries.

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The International Scientific and Technical Committee, supported by a World Health Organization (WHO) team in Zaire, has reported a slight increase in the number of cases of Ebola haemorrhagic fever. The total now stands at 280 confirmed or suspected cases, including 220 deaths, since the start of the epidemic.

Thirteen new cases -- 10 of them now in hospital in Kikwit -- have been reported since 9 June. These are people who, having been in contact with patients, have reached the end of the incubation period of the disease. None are health workers, the group which suffered most at the start of the epidemic.

WHO specialists expect that there will be more new cases, although they maintain that the acute phase of the epidemic has passed. However, they stress that the latest figures show that vigilance, as well as epidemiological surveillance, must be maintained.

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As part of its campaign to combat desertification, the General Assembly has designated 17 June 1995 as the first "World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought". This Day marks the first anniversary of the signing of the Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification.

The world is literally losing ground in its struggle against desertification. The problem is caused by a combination of climate variations, over-grazing and over-cropping, bad irrigation and deforestation, that could threaten more than a billion people -- nearly a fifth of the world's population.

According to the definition agreed by world leaders at the 1992 Earth

Summit and adopted by the Convention, desertification is "land degradation in arid, semi-arid and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors, including climate variations and human activities". In recognition of the seriousness of the problem of desertification, the Interim Secretariat for the Convention has commissioned "Down to Earth: A simple guide to the Convention to Combat Desertification, why it is necessary and what is important and different about it".

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A video conference between the Secretary-General at Headquarters and United States astronauts and Russian Federation cosmonauts in outer space will be among the events held to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. The Director of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, Nandasiri Jasentuliyana, made that announcement to the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space as it began its two-week session in Vienna.

Mr. Jasentuliyana said that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Space shuttle and the Mir space station would undertake a cooperative docking mission between 27 October and 2 November. They would carry the United Nations flag and special commemorative issues of the space treaties in honour of the fiftieth anniversary.

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The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations yesterday recommended that eight organizations be granted consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. The Committee recommended Global 2000 and Franciscans International for Category I status. Recommended for Category II status were: the Simon Wiesenthal Center; the Federal Union of European Nationalities; the International Hotel Association; the Latin American Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights; the African Society of International and Comparative Law; and Temple of Understanding.

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